

### Education

Skill-sharing is a major part of co-op life. Co-ops are concerned with opening up opportunities for members to learn such things as handy-person skills, typing, or communication skills. The potential for members to learn from the co-op community is far-reaching.

## HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT OF RHC's

Although England was the birthplace of the co-operative movement in the mid nineteenth century, co-operative housing plays a far bigger role in other countries, such as the Scandinavian countries of Sweden, Denmark and Norway and to an increasing extent in Canada and the USA. For example, in the city of Montreal in Canada there are over sixty rental co-ops.

Without government sponsorship, there is unlikely to be any large scale setting-up of rental co-ops in Australia. Funding for the purchase of houses and promotion of co-ops as an alternative form of tenure requires a commitment of capital and resources.

One alternative to government resources is illustrated by the growth of co-operative housing in Scandinavia and Canada. There, the impetus and sustenance for co-operative housing has been provided by unions, building co-op societies and national tenants' groups. These co-ordinating groups have the organisational and financial resources necessary to initiate a large scale movement and to later involve the government in the financing of co-operative housing.

### How Rental Co-ops Started in Victoria

The initiative for setting-up the pilot RHC, the Fitzroy Collingwood Rental Housing Association (FCRHA), came from the local community. An interim management committee made up of local representation from municipal councils and professionals with skills in law, finance, social work and building met for two years before making a detailed submission to the Ministry of Housing (MOH). The FCRHA was set up in 1977.

After evaluating the FCRHA for three years, the MOH decided in July, 1981, to advertise for submissions from groups working to establish RHCs.

The RHC programme funded by the MOH numbers fifteen, as at July, 1984. These are located in Mornington, Carlton, Williamstown, Frankston, Northcote, Moorabbin, Brunswick/Coburg, Footscray, Essendon, Springvale, Oakleigh, St. Kilda, North Geelong, Camberwell, Fitzroy/Collingwood.

### Directions For The Future

The concept of Rental Housing Co-operatives has gained recognition in Australia over the past few years as a workable housing alternative. CHAS has played a fundamental role in the development of the housing co-operative movement. To date, RHCs in Victoria have operated under the MOH leasing model, but moves are being made to broaden the options to include different types of RHCs which respond to a wider range of potential tenants and attract diverse funding sources.

## MEMBERSHIP OF CHAS

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You get a free use of photocopier and video tapes; access to CHAS resources; minutes of general meetings and sub-groups; all publications.

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# CHAS

574a Chapel St,  
Sth. Yarra.  
(03) 241 9937.



## WHAT IS CHAS?

Chas is the Rental Housing Co-operative Advisory Service. It was registered as a co-operative in December 1981.

Chas has four main aims:

### 1. To Promote the growth of Rental Housing Co-ops. (RHCs)

This involves providing and distributing information about RHCs to interested people and groups. To this end, CHAS has set up the following working groups:

#### (i) Information and Promotion

This group meets regularly and works actively to promote development and public awareness of co-ops as another choice of tenure. It has organised radio workshops, compiled a bibliography of films and videos and produced a poster to promote CHAS and co-ops.

(ii) **Alternative Financing and Models for Co-ops**  
This group is looking into other sources of financing co-ops, secondary co-ops (as a resource to RHCs), and different models of management which would extend the current choice.

### 2. To act as a resource base for potential and existing RHCs

Chas can provide the following resources which are available to members, subscribers and any interested people/organisations.

- (a) Written material — books, papers, pamphlets.
- (b) Videos and films.
- (c) Speakers for meetings, workshops, seminars and so on.
- (d) Skills people who can help with the setting-up and running of co-ops.

### 3. To act as a focal point for the co-operative housing movement.

If RHCs are to be recognised as a viable housing alternative, all those committed to the development of RHCs need a forum to build a united front. CHAS acts as a vehicle for the people to come together to work on issues facing the development of co-op housing movement. CHAS draws on the experience of existing co-ops to help formulate policies for the future.

### 4. To be involved in broader housing issues.

As RHCs are only one way of increasing people's options, CHAS is actively involved in housing issues in order to ensure an adequacy of funding to other forms of public housing.

### FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT

CHAS — (03) 241 9937

## WHAT IS CO-OP HOUSING?

Co-op housing is an alternative form of housing. Its main aim is to enable people to have greater control over their living conditions and to provide another option to the existing range in housing choice.

Rental Housing Co-ops (RHCs) are self-directing, non-profit, legal entities whose members collectively manage their housing stock.

Tenants who live in RHCs have an equal say through collective decision-making in relation to all matters concerning their housing.

RHCs operate according to the International Principles of Co-operation which were set down in 1966 by the International Co-operative Alliance. These principles have been adapted to housing co-ops and are as follows:

1. To provide low cost rental housing as an alternative to home ownership.
2. To have open and voluntary membership.
3. To develop and maintain a structure which ensures collective decision-making and is therefore sensitive to its members' needs.
4. To develop responsible tenant self-management.
5. To build a supportive community.
6. To provide housing which is managed co-operatively and not based on profit motives.
7. To make provision for co-op education.
8. To co-operate with other co-ops.

## WHY CO-OP HOUSING?

Finding good, secure housing is a major problem these days. Home ownership is no longer a realistic, nor desirable, proposition for many people. The other options include becoming a MoH tenant, or entering the private rental market.

Present public housing management by the MoH suffers from many of the problems associated with the centralization of power. Public housing has also become stigmatized as "welfare housing", instead of being a viable choice for all people. Those people who are eligible for public housing find themselves joining a very long waiting list which involves years of uncertainty and delay. Even when they are housed, there is no guarantee that the accommodation will be suitable.

Increasing numbers of people are forced to rent in the private sector where accommodation is in short supply and often sub-standard; rents are exorbitant, and tenants have very few rights.

Co-operative housing is able to become part of the local community. Its ability to adapt to local needs and conditions and its potential for increasing peoples' control over their own lives makes it a realistic and desirable choice for many. Co-operative housing offers affordable rents and secure tenure as well as tenant choice in renovation, selection and maintenance of properties. Many skills are shared within the co-operative community.

## BENEFITS OF CO-OPERATIVE HOUSING

### Security

RHCs aim to provide long-term security; a place where a tenant can live for the rest of their life, if they wish. A co-op tenant need not fear the threat of eviction nor tolerate harassment. By participating in management, co-op tenants are in charge of their own security of tenure in much the same way as home owners.

### Autonomy (Control)

RHCs are what their members choose to make them. They have the power to control their own destiny, rather than having to abide by rules imposed by either a public or private landlord. Together, co-op members decide what policies and procedures are necessary and appropriate for their co-operative, and are therefore able to respond efficiently and sensitively to the needs of their members.

### Community

For many people the co-op provides the opportunity to become a part of a close, supportive community.